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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: THAI OFFICIALS BRIEF DIPLOMATS  
ON IMPROVEMENTS IN THE SITUATION, BUT STATISTICS SUGGEST A  
MORE COMPLEX STORY

REF: BANGKOK 01210 (SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: RTG TALKS WITH  
INSURGENTS STALLED BUT IN "A GOOD SPOT")

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission, James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4  
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a June 30 briefing to the diplomatic corps about developments in southern Thailand, Thai officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Thai Army, and the Ministry of Interior outlined a broad strategy for dealing with the insurgency in the South. Deputy Commander of the Joint Civil-Police-Military Task Force said the situation in the deep south had improved dramatically over the past few months, but the insurgency appears to continue unabated. Security officials contend they are getting things under control and some statistics appear to bear this out. Anecdotal evidence on the ground, however, implies perceived improvements in the security situation may be ephemeral. Brutal attacks continue, while Thai government officials contend they have a plan in place to end the insurgency that is founded on principles of non-violence and justice. We believe senior Thai officials involved in quelling the violence are trying to reach beyond traditional security measures to find a solution, but we also are concerned that these officials are more focused on managing the violence than addressing grievances. Meanwhile, insurgents appear to be less constrained than in the past regarding their targets.

#### The Official Strategy

¶2. (SBU) In late June, Thai officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Thai Army, and the Ministry of Interior briefed the Bangkok-based diplomatic corps on Thailand's efforts to resolve the conflict in the deep south. Pranai Suwanrath, Director of the Southern Border Provinces Administration Center (SBPAC), told the diplomatic corps that the Thai government's strategy for resolving the southern violence rested on four principles: "non-violent means, justice and fair treatment, engagement with stakeholders, and fostering a better understanding of the actual situation in the south." According to Pranai, this meant first

suppressing the insurgency, then giving the Malay-Muslim population of the South a "correct understanding of the situation." Pranai said the military was in charge of the situation in the South because the violence must stop before the civilians can move in to develop and rebuild livelihoods and the economy of the region.

¶3. (SBU) Fourth Army Area spokesperson Colonel Acra Tiproch echoed Pranai's comments. He said the Civil-Police-Military task force, the operational arm of the Internal Security Operations Command in southern Thailand, had to first provide security to local people, then provide them with a correct interpretation of history, religion, and nationalism in order to break the hold of the insurgents. Continuing, Acra said the insurgency is different from past security challenges because the RTG had not been able to identify a leadership structure. He said because there is no known leadership, there can be no negotiations to end the violence. He also said, however, that the insurgents have a clear strategy to draw the international community into the conflict by claiming they are the victims of injustice.

¶4. (SBU) At the same briefing Deputy Commander of the Joint Civil-Police-Military Task Force, Major General Jumlong Kunsong, said the army was conducting operations based on the principles Pranai outlined, and was experiencing good results. He said local populations were beginning to trust the army and giving it more help; this has led to more arrests and to a dramatic improvement in the security situation over the past several months. When asked specifically about allegations of human rights abuses, he defended the army's use of force against the insurgents, but said the use of "unjust means" was completely forbidden. He acknowledged that there were likely people at lower levels

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who may have engaged in misconduct, but said anyone guilty of this type of misconduct would be punished.

#### The Numbers

¶5. (SBU) Statistics appear to bear out General Jumlong's contention that the security in the South was getting better. During the first six months of 2008, there were 563 violent incidents, compared with 1,135 for the same period in 2007. Using the number of violent incidents as an indicator of the security situation, however, is problematic. No two sources report the same numbers, what is included as an incident is unclear, and determination as to what incidents are attributable to the insurgency is subjective and dependent on Thai government reporting. Nonetheless, there appears to be a downward trend in the number of violent incidents for the first six months of 2008. At the same time, however the proportion of killed and injured per incident appears to be higher than in the previous period. For example, Isara news agency reports that for the first six months of 2007 there were 1,135 violent incidents resulting in 417 deaths, or a death per incident ratio of 36.74 percent, and for all of 2007, 867 deaths resulted from 2,025 incidents or 42.81 deaths per incident. In the first six months of 2008, there were 563 incidents and 301 deaths, or a ratio of 53.46 percent. The same holds true for those injured. In all of 2007, there were 1,720 injuries from 2,025 incidents and in the first six months of 2008, 517 injured in 563 incidents. This puts the injured-per-incident ratio at 84.94 and 91.83 respectively. Although we hesitate to attribute too much weight to these numbers, it appears that either the militants or security forces are becoming more efficient.

#### The Violence

¶6. (SBU) Anecdotal information helps give a more complete

story about what is happening on the ground. A variety of press reporting since the beginning of June points to a continued climate of fear. For example:

- In Narathiwat, four militants boarded a train, opened fire, and killed three railway workers and a police officer.
- In Yala, unidentified men riding in the back of a pick-up truck sprayed a tea-shop with automatic weapons fire, killing three people and wounding five.
- In Yala, an elementary school principal was assassinated, prompting the temporary closure of 55 primary schools in Raman district.
- In Pattani, insurgents opened fire on a truck carrying students to school, killing two rangers escorting the students. Three students were injured in the ambush.
- A school bus driver, after dropping students off at school, was forced off the road by suspected militants. As he was crawling out of the bus, he was shot in the head.
- In Pattani, a couple taking their son to school was shot and killed, and their bodies set on fire. Their son escaped uninjured.
- A 56 year-old Buddhist in Yala was shot, beheaded, nailed to the road, and set on fire. His 28-year-old son was injured.

#### Insurgents Targeting More Selectively

17. (C) According to Don Pathan, reporter for The Nation newspaper, the number of attacks in the deep south are going

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down because the insurgents have chosen to be more selective in their targets, and to preserve their "human resources." Pathan said his contacts have told him that hardened RKK units are now only being used for attacks the insurgent leadership considers either high profile or "important." (Note: RKK stands for Runda Kumpulan Kecil, and is the acronym Thai authorities have given to insurgent commando units. End note.) According to Pathan, younger cadres who are seeking a place in the insurgency, and are considered expendable, carry out the more routine operations. Pathan said anger and a longing for a place in society is driving the youth into the conflict. The insurgency is giving them an identity -- "one day a kid is a struggling laborer or rubber tapper, the next, after joining the militants, he believes he is part of a heroic struggle against the Thai government."

18. (S) Pathan, who is in contact with the Henri Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC) about its efforts to broker a peace deal between the Thai government and the insurgents (reftel), said he believes HDC is "barking up the wrong tree." He said the people HDC is bringing to the negotiations have little ability to control the insurgency. According to Pathan, HDC's interlocutors are from the former generation of insurgents; they are appalled at the tactics the newer generation of BRN-C leaders are using. (Note: BRN-C is the Barisan Revulusi Nasional-Coordinate, and is the insurgent group many analysts believe to be behind the violence in the south.) He said the older militants are begging the RTG for something so they can show their relevance to the new generation of militants; they are looking for some way to exert some influence over them. According to Pathan, the RTG is not obliging them.

Comment

19. (C) We do not perceive the violence in southern Thailand is any closer to being resolved than at any other time in the previous four years. This is a brutal conflict which the Thai army correctly understands as a challenge to Thai sovereignty. We believe the majority of people living in the South are tired of the killing and fear, but are locked in a cycle of violence that has tuned the conflict into a way of life. Although Thai officials appear to be exploring new ways to address the insurgency, their insistence on reeducating militants about history, religion, and nationalism could back fire and further stoke resentment against the government.

JOHN